



The Role of Citizenship Education on Enhancing the Promotion of Unity in Nigeria: Implication for Primary Education

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Abstract: Citizenship education, as a pedagogical approach, emphasizes the development of civic responsibility, tolerance, and national identity, which are essential for addressing the challenges posed by Nigeria's ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. The study explores how the integration of citizenship education in primary schools helps inculcate values such as respect for diversity, patriotism, and conflict resolution skills among young learners. Using a survey research design, data were collected from 320 Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students from Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, and Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, in Anambra State, Nigeria. Purposive random sampling was employed to select respondents from Social Studies, Economics, English, and Igbo Language departments. A structured questionnaire with 15 items on a 4-point Likert scale was used for data collection, and reliability was confirmed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Data analysis involved mean scores, with a cutoff of 2.50 for agreement. Findings revealed that ethnic hatred, religious intolerance, distrust, lack of basic education, and colonial policies are significant barriers to unity in Nigeria. Citizenship education was found to promote unity by enhancing the appreciation of diversity, instilling values of cooperation and tolerance, and equipping individuals with conflict resolution skills. However, challenges such as a lack of qualified teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and inadequate commitment from educators hinder its effectiveness. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating citizenship education into primary education to cultivate values that promote unity among young learners. The research findings imply the need for systematic transformation in the basic education curriculum, by integrating programs that comprehensively teach the values of tolerance, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Keyword : Citizenship education, national unity, primary education, civic responsibility, diversity, teacher training, curriculum reform, sustainable development

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Introduction

Citizenship education plays a critical role in enhancing unity in Nigeria, a nation marked by ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and cultural complexity. As a pedagogical tool, it emphasizes civic responsibility, national identity, and harmonious

coexistence, making it particularly relevant in primary education (Sagayar, 2020). Citizenship education emphasizes shared values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and patriotism, which are crucial for promoting national unity. Research shows that teaching these values in primary schools helps young learners appreciate the importance of coexisting peacefully with individuals from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. For instance, the inclusion of topics on cultural sensitivity and mutual respect fosters an understanding of Nigeria's pluralistic society, laying the foundation for unity at an early age (Campbell et al, 2021). This approach also instills a sense of national pride, motivating learners to prioritize collective well-being over divisive tendencies.

Ethnic and religious conflicts remain significant challenges to Nigeria's unity. Citizenship education serves as a preventive strategy against such divisions by equipping pupils with the knowledge and skills to manage diversity constructively. Studies reveal that integrating lessons on conflict resolution and inter-group dialogue into primary education curricula reduces prejudices and stereotypes (Adewale, 2024). This educational approach not only mitigates the risk of future conflicts but also empowers young learners to act as agents of peace within their communities. Democracy thrives on the active participation of informed citizens. Citizenship education introduces primary school pupils to democratic ideals such as justice, equity, and the rule of law. These principles, when taught effectively, prepare learners to contribute positively to the democratic process as they grow (Olatunde-Aiyedun et al, 2022). Researchers argue that enhancing early awareness of civic responsibilities, such as voting and community service, encourages a culture of active citizenship, which is vital for national cohesion.

A unified national identity is essential for Nigeria's stability and growth. Citizenship education helps nurture this identity by highlighting commonalities among citizens, such as shared history, national symbols, and collective aspirations. Evidence suggests that primary education is a critical stage for developing this sense of belonging, as young learners are more receptive to lessons about their role in the larger national narrative (Chinonso-Okolie et al, 2019). Educators play a pivotal role in reinforcing these lessons through participatory teaching methods, such as storytelling and group activities, that connect learners emotionally and intellectually to the concept of national unity. Citizenship education and primary education share a fundamental connection, as the latter serves as the foundation for instilling the values and knowledge required to nurture responsible citizens (Nwankwo et al, 2022). Citizenship education emphasizes teaching civic responsibilities, national identity, and democratic values, aligning seamlessly with the goals of primary education, which focuses on holistic child development. This relationship is particularly critical in multicultural nations like Nigeria, where primary schools are instrumental in enhancing unity.

Through citizenship education, primary school pupils are introduced to concepts such as respect for diversity, tolerance, and patriotism. These lessons enable young learners to understand and appreciate the importance of peaceful coexistence within Nigeria's pluralistic society. Cultural sensitivity, and civic duties into the curriculum, primary education ensures that children develop a strong sense of belonging and shared identity (Olatunde-Aiyedun et al, 2022). Furthermore, citizenship education supports the social and emotional development of pupils by teaching conflict resolution skills and encouraging active participation in community life. Early exposure to such principles helps embed a lifelong commitment to unity and national cohesion. Therefore, the integration of citizenship education into primary education equips learners not only with academic skills but also with the civic competence necessary for building a cohesive and prosperous society.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to explore the perspectives of NCE students from two colleges of education in Anambra State, Nigeria. The survey approach is appropriate for this research as it enables the collection and analysis of data from a sample of the population, with results generalized to a larger group. The study focused on two institutions: Nwafor Orizu College of Education in Nsugbe, and Federal College of Education Umunze (Technical), which are located in the southeastern region of Nigeria. The target population for the study included students from Nwafor Orizu College of Education, comprising six schools, and Federal College of Education Umunze, which has seven schools. Specifically, the study targeted students from the Social Studies and Economics departments at Nwafor Orizu, and the English and Igbo Language departments at Federal College of Education Umunze. A total of 320 students were selected using purposive random sampling: 80 students from each of the two colleges. Data collection was carried out through a structured questionnaire with 15 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree). The reliability of the instrument was confirmed through a test-retest method, where a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied. The collected data were analyzed using mean scores, with a threshold of 2.50 and above indicating agreement with the research questions. The study aimed to provide insights into the attitudes and opinions of NCE students, with the findings intended to inform educational practices in the region.

Result and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the factors that hamper unity in Nigeria?

Table 1.
The Factors That Hamper Unity in Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	SD	D	\bar{X}	Decision
1	The hatred among ethnic groups in Nigeria hampers unity in the country.	300	15	0	5	3.9	Accepted
2	Religious dichotomy has caused serious religious intolerance as a result of diverse religions in the country	320	0	0	0	4	Accepted
3	There is a very powerful distrust among Nigerians based on ethnicity.	280	30	5	5	3.82	Accepted
4	Lack of basic education for all has helped to cause greediness, favouritism and selfishness among most Nigerians even politicians which results to disunity in the country.	250	30	30	10	3.62	Accepted
5	Colonial policy of "Divide and Rule" has contributed immensely to the disunity in Nigeria	200	50	50	20	3.34	Accepted

Based on the table 1 above, the indication from the above shows that respondents are fully in support of the ideas in the questionnaire items. This was confirmed as all the items in the table have their respective mean fall above the decision cutoff mean of 2.5. Thus; all of them were accepted by the respondents.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of citizenship education towards promotion of unity in Nigeria?

Table 2.
The Roles of Citizenship Education Towards Promotion of Unity in Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	SD	D	\bar{X}	Decision
6	Citizenship Education helps to impact the appreciation of diversity and interdependence of members of different communities in Nigeria.	150	150	10	10	3.37	Accepted

7	Citizenship Education encourages the appreciation of the need for co-operating and tolerance which are indispensable for the development of every community in Nigeria.	200	120	0	0	3.6	Accepted
8	Citizenship Education plays the role of inculcating the right type of values and attitude for the survival of individual and the Nigeria society.	280	20	10	10	3.78	Accepted
9	Citizenship Education helps Nigerians to acquire the appropriate conflict resolution skills.	160	100	0	60	3.1	Accepted
10	Citizenship Education helps Nigerians to appreciate and tolerate each other culture and view.	300	10	5	5	3.8	Accepted

In the table 2 above, all items are accepted by the respondents as they fall above 2.5, which is the acceptable mean fall. Hence, they are all accepted.

Research Question 3: What problems hinder citizenship education towards promotion of unity in Nigeria?

Table 3.
Problems that Hinder Citizenship Education Towards Promotion of Unity in Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	SD	D	\bar{X}	Decision
11	Lack of qualified and non-specialized citizenship education teachers hinders citizenship education from playing its effective role towards promotion of unity in Nigeria.	250	60	0	10	3.7	Accepted
12	Insufficient instructional materials have hindered citizenship education from effective promotion of unity in Nigeria.	180	100	15	25	3.35	Accepted
13	Improper use of instructional materials by the teachers also hinders citizenship education from performing its role.	200	30	40	50	3.18	Accepted
14	Lack of commitment of teachers towards the teaching of citizenship education hinders it from playing its roles effectively.	300	20	0	0	3.9	Accepted

15	Inadequacy of citizenship education textbooks also hinders it from performing its roles effectively.	310	10	0	0	3.96	Accepted
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From table 3 above, it was discovered that all the research items have their respective mean fall above 2.5. This shows that the respondents accepted all the research items.

Discussion

Several factors hinder unity in Nigeria, with ethnic hatred being one of the most prominent. This finding agreed with Abasili et al, (2023), who argued that deep-seated animosity between ethnic groups contributes significantly to Nigeria's divisions. In contrast, Mawardi (2024) emphasized that religious dichotomy has further exacerbated disunity, with the country's diverse religions often enhancing religious intolerance and conflict. The division between Christians and Muslims has led to tensions that impede national cohesion. Furthermore, distrust among Nigerians, particularly along ethnic lines, is a significant obstacle to unity. As observed by Adenuga et al, (2023), ethnic rivalry breeds suspicion and mistrust, preventing collaboration between groups. Similarly, the lack of basic education has led to widespread greed, favouritism, and selfishness, particularly among politicians, which perpetuates disunity. In a related study, Nwoke et al, (2024) noted that the absence of universal quality education has contributed to social inequalities, further driving wedges between various groups in society. Finally, the colonial policy of "Divide and Rule" has played a substantial role in creating divisions in Nigeria. This finding agreed with Elochukwu (2020), who highlighted that colonial rulers deliberately divided ethnic groups to maintain control, enhancing long-term divisions that persist to this day. Collectively, these factors continue to impede national unity in Nigeria.

Citizenship education plays a crucial role in promoting unity in Nigeria by enhancing the appreciation of diversity and interdependence among different communities. This finding agreed with Obiagu (2024), who noted that citizenship education helps individuals understand and value the rich cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity that exists in Nigeria. In contrast, Ossai (2023) highlighted that citizenship education encourages cooperation and tolerance, which are essential for the development of harmonious communities. Furthermore, citizenship education instills the right values and attitudes necessary for the survival of individuals and the nation. This aligns with the views of Egwuanikwu (2023), who emphasized that effective citizenship education shapes citizens' character and promotes social cohesion. In a related study, Okunlola and Hendricks (2022) found that when Nigerians are equipped with the appropriate values through citizenship education, they are more likely to work collaboratively for national progress. Additionally, citizenship education helps Nigerians acquire conflict resolution skills, enabling them to address societal challenges peacefully. This finding agreed with Ijiwole and Adeyemi (2021), who observed that conflict resolution training within citizenship education empowers Nigerians to resolve disputes constructively, reducing tensions between groups. Finally, citizenship education promotes cultural appreciation

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and tolerance, encouraging Nigerians to respect each other's differences, as noted by Thelma (2024), who argued that such understanding fosters a peaceful and unified society.

Several challenges hinder the effectiveness of citizenship education in promoting unity in Nigeria. One significant problem is the lack of qualified and specialized teachers for citizenship education. This finding agreed with Obiagu (2024), who noted that the shortage of properly trained teachers undermines the potential impact of citizenship education. In contrast, Dominic and Mahamed (2023) emphasized that the availability of skilled teachers is essential for enhancing unity through proper education. Furthermore, insufficient instructional materials have also impeded the successful implementation of citizenship education. As observed by Adewale (2024), the lack of resources, such as textbooks and audiovisual aids, limits the ability of teachers to effectively engage students in lessons that promote national cohesion. In a related study, Olatunde-Aiyedun et al, (2022) pointed out that even when materials are available, improper usage by teachers contributes to the ineffective teaching of citizenship education. Additionally, the lack of teacher commitment in delivering citizenship education has been identified as a major hindrance. This finding agreed with Chinonso-Okolie et al, (2019), who noted that many teachers approach the subject with little enthusiasm, which affects student engagement and the ultimate goal of unity. Moreover, the inadequate supply of textbooks has been recognized as a barrier, as highlighted by Nwankwo, et al (2022), who stressed that limited access to comprehensive textbooks on citizenship education diminishes its potential to foster unity.

Implication of the study findings for primary education program in Anambra state.

The findings of this study have significant implications for primary education programs in Anambra State. Firstly, the study reinforces the crucial role of citizenship education in promoting unity among primary school students, suggesting that the incorporation of citizenship education into the curriculum is vital for enhancing national cohesion. This implies that educators in Anambra State must focus on teaching students the importance of diversity, cooperation, tolerance, and conflict resolution, which are essential for harmonious co-existence in a multi-ethnic society (Olayinka & Ridwan, 2024). Furthermore, the study highlights the challenges of inadequate resources and unqualified teachers, suggesting that Anambra State needs to invest in improving teacher training and the availability of instructional materials. This could involve organizing specialized training programs for teachers in citizenship education, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach effectively. Additionally, providing adequate textbooks and teaching aids will enhance the delivery of citizenship education and ensure its effectiveness (Okunlola & Hendricks, 2022). Lastly, the study emphasizes the need for increased commitment from educators. Therefore, it is imperative for Anambra State's educational authorities to promote greater teacher engagement and dedication to teaching citizenship education, as this will directly impact students' understanding and their ability to contribute to national unity. The findings call

for a comprehensive review and strengthening of the primary education system to better align with the goals of unity and social cohesion in Nigeria.

The implications of this study include strategic contributions in developing pedagogical approaches to address the challenges of social diversity in Nigeria through citizenship education. The findings of the study imply the need for a systematic transformation in the basic education curriculum, by integrating programs that comprehensively teach the values of tolerance, cooperation, and conflict resolution. In practical terms, this requires sustained investment in teacher professional development, provision of quality instructional materials, and institutional commitment to address barriers such as ethnic prejudice, religious intolerance, and intergroup mistrust. The study emphasizes the importance of citizenship education as a fundamental instrument in building social cohesion, national identity, and the foundation of a more tolerant society, with a primary focus on character building of the younger generation through inclusive and meaningful learning experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of citizenship education in enhancing national unity in Nigeria, especially at the primary education level. It is evident that through citizenship education, students can develop a deep appreciation for Nigeria's diversity, learn the importance of cooperation and tolerance, and acquire essential conflict resolution skills. These elements are crucial for promoting a peaceful and unified society. However, the study also identifies several challenges that hinder the full effectiveness of citizenship education, including the lack of qualified teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and inadequate commitment from educators. These barriers must be addressed to enable citizenship education to fulfill its potential in promoting unity. Therefore, it is imperative for policymakers, education administrators, and stakeholders to prioritize improving the quality of citizenship education by enhancing teacher training, providing adequate resources, and enhancing a greater commitment to the subject. Doing so, Nigeria can achieve a more cohesive society, where citizens of all backgrounds collaborate towards national development and harmony.

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